**Prometheus and the Fire**

When Zeus, the king of the Olympian gods, was young, he was challenged by a group of ferocious Titans, who tried to keep him from gaining power. A long war ensued, with all the Olympian gods joined against the Titans. After ten years of fighting, Zeus and his fellow Olympians defeated the enemy. Only a few Titans, particularly Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus, fought on the side of Zeus, against their fellow Titans. Once Zeus emerged victorious he granted the brothers some rewards.

Zeus permitted Prometheus and Epimetheus to populate the earth with creatures and humans. Epimetheus foolishly gave all the good qualities to the animals: Strength and speed, the ability to fly, to stay warm in all conditions, to possess a keen sense of smell, superb cunning and instinct, to live underwater... Sadly, when it came time for Man to be endowed with qualities, there were very few left. The scatterbrained Epimetheus had given away all the goods to the creatures so that there was no quality to make Man a match for the beasts. Desperate and sorry, he begged his brother for help. Prometheus took over the task of creation and considered ways to make humans superior.

Prometheus had created humans in the likeness of gods, using clay and water, and Athena had breathed a living soul into them. To compensate for the lack of great qualities, which had foolishly all been given to the creatures by Epimetheus, the wise Titan made Man stand upright like the gods, to be noble and conscious, and to hold his head high, looking up at the heavens. Prometheus looked with joy upon his creation.

He felt bad, however, because when Man sacrificed to the gods, the best portions of the animal were offered to the Olympians, leaving little for the people. So Prometheus tricked Zeus into choosing one pile of offerings, cleverly disguised to look delicious, but instead hiding fat and bones.

Zeus fell for the trick and chose the wrong pile, and from then on humans got to keep the good and tasty parts of the animal offerings, giving to Zeus the useless portions. This made the King of the Olympians real mad, so he punished Prometheus, who was laughing at him. Zeus took fire away from Man - "Let them eat their meat raw!" he shouted. "Let's see how your Men keep warm in the winter!"

Well, you know that didn't sit well with Prometheus. Every day he looked down with sadness upon his creation, watching them shiver in the cold and try to eat their food raw. Slowly they began to die and Prometheus could no longer sit by idly. Prometheus arranged a meeting with Athena and asked her for help. Athena showed Prometheus a hidden backstairs entrance to Olympus and he gained entrance to the Palace of the gods.

Upon arriving he lit a torch from the fiery chariot of the sun god, as Helios passed by. Breaking off a fragment of glowing charcoal, he hid the fire inside a gourd. Prometheus then worked his way down the side of Mount Olympus. And what a dangerous journey it was! The rebel Prometheus, who had taken such a personal risk for Man, now was faced with getting the fire back down to earth. With each step he took, he fully expected to be seen by Zeus and to be struck dead with one of his killer thunderbolts.

But Prometheus made it to earth and proudly gave the fire to the humans, who were overjoyed. Soon Zeus smelled the tantalizing scent of cooked meat drifting up to Olympus from earth and when he looked down he was outraged! There were the humans he had supposedly punished, happily cooking their food and keeping warm around their fires. Zeus was furious!

That was twice that Prometheus had made the King of the Olympians look bad and this time Zeus was not holding back any punches. He had three giants take Prometheus to the top of Mount Caucasus. They tied him down to a giant rock with chains, and each day for thirty years an enormous eagle, sent by Zeus, would arrive and eat at Prometheus' liver, feasting on the helpless Titan. To make matters worse, the liver would grow back overnight and the whole ordeal would be repeated the following day.

Being a god he was immortal and couldn’t die, so his ordeal could not be eased. At one point Zeus offered him a chance to free himself by revealing information that Prometheus knew. Since our hero had the power of Foresight, he knew the name of the one who would overthrow Zeus, just like Zeus had done to Cronus. The King of the Olympians promised Prometheus that he would set him free if only the Titan revealed the identity of his potential usurper.

Prometheus told the Messenger god Hermes, who had delivered Zeus' offer, to tell his boss no. He couldn't be bribed. Zeus felt bad, and admired Prometheus for sticking to his ideals. So he offered a glimmer of hope to our hero: Zeus told the Titan that he could go free if two conditions were met:

1) An immortal would have to give up his life for Prometheus, and  
2) a mortal would have to slay the liver-eating eagle

Yay! A happy ending: you see, the Centaur (half man, half horse) named Chiron had been accidentally shot and wounded by one of Heracles' (Hercules) poisoned arrows. But being an Immortal, the gentle Centaur could not die, but lived in horrid pain from the lethal poison. Hearing of the plight of Prometheus, Chiron volunteered to die in his stead so that his unbearable pain would cease, at the same time conferring his immortality upon the chained Titan. It was a mutually beneficial move and fulfilled the first part of Zeus' terms. Now, where could be found a mortal hero brave enough to challenge the ferocious eagle?

Have no fear, Heracles is here! Passing by Mount Caucasus one day the world's greatest hero, mighty Heracles, saw Prometheus bound to the rock, with the frightful eagle merrily munching on his liver. This would not do! Heracles was famous for always taking the side of the just, the powerless and the overwhelmed. Armed with his bow and arrows, gifts from the gods, mighty Heracles took aim and let fly a missile at the beast. Bingo! One shot was all it took and the eagle was killed instantly by the poisoned arrow...

Prometheus was now free to go! By this time Zeus had realized his folly in imposing such a stern sentence upon the brave Titan, so he invited Prometheus to come and live on Mount Olympus. All was forgiven and our hero rejoined his rightful place at the home of the gods.